

Forest Land Enhancement Program

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Photo by Madeline Hildreth

The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) provides financial, technical, and educational assistance to non-industrial private landowners. Authorized under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, as amended by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, FLEP was established to provide additional financial assistance through State Foresters to encourage the long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forestlands (NIPF). Through FLEP, the Secretary of Agriculture will achieve the federal objectives of this program: to invest practices that establish, restore, protect, manage, maintain, and enhance the health and productivity of the NIPF lands in the United States. Protected resources include timber, plant habitat, soil, water, air quality, wetlands, and riparian buffers (streamside management zones).

Alabama has the second largest commercial forest in the nation with three-fourths of the State (22 million acres) covered in forests. This natural resource, most of which is owned by private landowners (75%), is important to the people of Alabama, providing wood, products, jobs, recreation, and environmental benefits. Forests provide homes, food, and shelter for an abundance of plants and wildlife, including a variety of threatened and endangered species. They also provide filtering mechanisms for the purification and protection of Alabama's soil, air, and water resources. There is significant public interest in encouraging and promoting good stewardship of Alabama's natural resources, which are among the most diverse in the nation. Because private landowners play the pri-

mary role in maintaining and enhancing these forestlands, it is extremely important that these landowners are supported in carrying out proper land management in meeting their objectives.

Alabama has developed a State Priority Plan, which sets forth the administrative procedures that the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) will utilize to implement FLEP to promote well managed, sustainable forest management practices on non-industrial private forestland. The resource management technical assistance, education, and financial cost-share assistance provided under this program will complement existing state and federal programs currently providing assistance to NIPFs. The FLEP program may be used to augment the existing state cost-share program and would provide cost-share funds for multiple-use practices currently not funded or under-funded in the state program. Initially cost-share would not be a part of the program offered to landowners. However, needs for this assistance will be monitored and re-evaluated annually. The plan outlines program policies, priorities, and procedures necessary to accomplish the objectives. The State Forester and the Alabama State Stewardship Advisory Committee have developed this priority plan. The Alabama State Stewardship Advisory Committee set the following priority areas:

Technical Assistance

- Partner with other organizations/professionals to provide technical assis-

tance (consulting foresters, biologist, ecologists, and the cooperative extension service)

- Provide invasive plant control recommendations
- Provide multiple-use management recommendations
- Increase the number of resource professionals available to assist private landowners

Landowner Education

- Pine plantation management (existing and future) with emphasis on forest health, productivity, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity
- Education for resource professionals and landowners
- Establish demonstration sites
- Address the issue of pine plantation management in current markets
- Expand existing education programs (such as Forest Mentors and Forest Masters)
- CD ROM for landowners
- Provide multiple-use management education
- Provide wood products education for landowners

- Forestry tours, demonstrations, and publications
- Uses of biomass products as an energy source
- Economic opportunities available to landowners
- Specialized vendor lists

FY 2003 FLEP Grants

AFC Technical Assistance & Education Programs for Landowners —

Some of these funds will be used by the AFC to provide additional technical assistance and educational programs to landowners. This may include educational workshops and printed publications. The AFC will also assist other organizations and agencies to provide some of this assistance, while providing landowner tours (reported in number of attendees), and stand management recommendations (reported in acres) to landowners as a part of this component.

Forestry Consultant Assistance for Landowners — Under this agreement, Alabama Registered Foresters that attend two training workshops would provide technical and educational assistance to non-industrial private landowners. A Longleaf Pine Management Workshop will be held at the Solon Dixon Center in Andalusia and a Hardwood Management Workshop would be held in Selma to train Registered Foresters to provide landowners with a written management prescription for longleaf pine and hardwood management.

Develop a Resource Book, “Managing Sustainable Forests in Alabama” — A book about forestry will be developed for landowners to serve as a reference book to help them better understand the advice they receive from foresters. It should supplement the work done by professional foresters and will not be intended to replace the involvement of a professional forester in managing private lands. These topics might include such things as: managing forests for game and non-game species; benefits of different types or harvesting and regeneration methods; the use and benefits of prescribed burning; economic considerations and many other topics.

Wildlife Biologist Assistance to Farm Forest Landowners — The Alabama Farmers Foundation will employ a wildlife biologist to provide forest landowners and farmers in Alabama with

much needed professional assistance in managing their wildlife resources and promote landowner stewardship. The biologist will work with farm-forest landowners to help them better understand how to improve economic returns through more intensive wildlife management. A 20-25 minute video will be produced that will outline wildlife management practices that farm-forest landowners can implement to increase wildlife populations in row crop and cattle production areas. A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation will also be developed for landowner wildlife education meetings.

Invasive Plant Species Council — This funding will further provide forest landowners in Alabama with much needed professional assistance focused on identification and control of non-native invasive species that threaten Alabama’s natural heritage. Presentations and training workshops on non-native invasive species would be conducted to educate landowners and support statewide initiatives such as the Alabama Invasive Plant Council. Goals are to promote and encourage land management and restoration activities that will improve native biological integrity and water quality in Alabama’s rivers and streams. Information about various tools and mechanisms available to control and eliminate non-native species would be prepared and distributed to landowners.

Early Successional Habitat Management (training and publication materials) — Throughout the Southeast, many wildlife species associated with early successional habitats have declined to historical lows. For example, in Alabama, bobwhite quail populations have declined at a rate of nine percent over the past decade. Although these declines have been attributed to a variety of factors such as coyotes, fire ants, and hawks, the primary cause has been the effects of landscape level deterioration of quail habitat associated with maximizing land use. Several training sessions, two days each, will be provided for Natural Resource Professionals with AFC, WFF, and NRCS and others to provide understanding of the range of wildlife species that benefit from early successional habitat, and discussion of management actions that increase early successional habitat. To familiarize landowners with these management prescriptions, a reference guide will be developed and printed.

The guide will contain wildlife species associated with early successional habitats and their life history, population trends based on breeding bird surveys, species distribution maps, and habitat management practices.

Providing Forest Management to Underserved Landowners — Many minority landowners do not fully appreciate the benefits and opportunities of their forestland. They do not always see forestland as an investment or are not aware of how to manage their property for multiple use and benefits. Additional information and educational assistance would be provided to minority landowners through training workshops and technical assistance.

Management of Riparian Forests in Alabama (brochure) — The AFC would enter into an agreement to produce a brochure presenting information relating to the management of riparian forests in Alabama. The brochure will show the different types of streams and riparian areas and the geographic extent of riparian forests in Alabama. It will present the valuable functions that riparian forests provide, such as improved water quality, floodwater storage, aquatic integrity, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics. Finally, the brochure will present the proper management recommendations for riparian forests, including identifying and maintaining streamside management zones, silvicultural practices, regeneration systems, and their implications regarding future land use trends. This brochure will be a handy guide for the landowner to use in managing their property. All practices funded would follow FLEP guidelines and specific funding amounts would be tracked and reported. Eligibility requirements, procedures, reporting, and recapture of payment will be the same as currently outlined in the existing program guide. Depending on the total allocation to the state, approximately 15% of the funds will be used for program administration. The administrative costs include program oversight, processing grant applications, issuing payments, and maintaining program records and documentation.

Legal Authority: (1) Farm Bill, Title VIII – Forestry, Subtitle A – Cooperative Forestry Assistance, Act of 1978, Sec. 4(b)(1).

(2) Identified as a top priority by the Alabama Stewardship Advisory Committee. ♻️